EDITORIAL

Our Editorial back in August referred to state school principals and council members who've asked why they're only permitted to spend the money they've received through the Commonwealth government's $16.2 billion Building the Education Revolution (BER) program on developments that don't adequately meet their needs. That Editorial explained how Beaconsfield Upper Primary School in Melbourne's outer south-east managed to get approval from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the full-size gymnasium it wanted after school council president Gavin McGill spoke out on the issue on ABC TV's *Stateline Victoria* in June. Now nearby Langwarrin Primary School council president Damien Pepper has persuaded Julia Gillard to ask the Victorian department, as the Deputy Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education explained, to 'look at the issue again, because it seemed to me there were clearly problems with what was being suggested.' Langwarrin Primary wanted to use its $3 million from the Commonwealth government's BER fund to build a public-use centre, with a canteen and arts space, but was told it could use the money only to replace existing buildings. 'We talk through the government's reform agenda…and occasionally we get someone at one of those forums who says, "I have got this real problem," and we go through exactly the same process that we have been through here.' As we advised back in August, 'Never look a gift horse in the mouth, unless, of course, the gift is from the Commonwealth government through the intermediary offices of the various state education departments, in which case you should check the hooves as well.' T

FAST FACTS

Charles Darwin was born: 1809.

Published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*: November 1859.

Amended the closing sentence of the second edition, published in January 1860, to include 'by the Creator': 'There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.'

Published *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*: March 1871.

Admitted in a letter in 1879 to John Fordyce: 'I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. I think that generally, and more and more so as I grow older, but not always, that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.'

QUICK QUIZ

1. The greatest source of variance, at 30 per cent, that affects student achievement is the teacher. True or false?
2. For Brian Caldwell, which is the most important unit of organisation – the student, classroom, school or system?
3. Is Pluto a planet?
4. Does the phrase 'Don't just do something, stand there' sum up Philip Shanahan's successful approach to revision for his Year 9 Science class?
5. What is the conflict-based game that teachers say is reducing behavioural problems in students?
6. Does Ken Boston support national testing?
7. As measured by the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which have the higher average percentage of top performers, private or public schools?
8. The top performers in PISA tend to be native language speakers. True or false?
9. According to PISA, gender has an impact on performance. True or false?
10. Where was the Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre?

Answers: 1. false – according to John Hattie, students themselves account for about 50 per cent of the variance of achievement, although teachers are 'the greatest source of variance that *can make the difference*'; 2. the student; 3. sadly, no – it was downgraded to a dwarf planet in 2006, with no whining from Pluto as yet; 4. yes; 5. chess; 6. yes, but not the use of results from such tests for purposes for which they are not fit; 7. private schools – 14 per cent compared to 9 per cent – although after adjusting for socio-economic differences public schools have the higher average percentage of top performers; 8. true; 9. false; 10. Wodonga, Victoria.

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